

January 10, 2020

SAC Revisions 1/1/20

To: Mayor Lane and City Council

From: Teresa Kim Quale, Chair, Scottsdale Public Library Board

Re: Recommendation that Scottsdale Public Library Become Late-Fine Free

The Scottsdale Library Board is deeply committed to assisting the Scottsdale Library to fulfill its mission of “Putting People at the Heart of Dynamic Library Services”. We take seriously our role as defined in Sec. 20-17 of the city code *“to advise the city manager through the city council on general policy relating to the operation of the library.”*

For the past two years, the members of the Board have been studying how best to expand the use of our library, including the most effective way to improve access for all Scottsdale citizens. Many hours of research and study have been devoted to this topic by staff and various Board members. The Board and library staff held a special work-study meeting on November 6th devoted exclusively to this topic. In addition to the going “late fine-free” option, we examined other possible choices, including automatic renewals, no late fine for “children only” and a limited amnesty program.

There is no question that late fines and/or the possibilities of incurring fines are a serious barrier to those in our community with limited means, fixed income and/or transportation challenges. The majority of “fine-blocked” cards are for residents in Scottsdale’s less affluent areas. Scottsdale’s population is over 255,000, and less than 50% have a library card. Approximately nine percent of Scottsdale’s households are below the poverty level. A likely factor is that the “fear of fines” means some families won’t seek a card and, in particular, are reluctant for their children to have a card.

Without a library card, Scottsdale residents are denied access to electronic databases, career and education resources and literary materials. In addition, significant staff time is used to document, communicate and collect fines and to manage related negative patron interactions .

In January 2019, the American Library Association adopted a resolution stating that the

“imposition of monetary library fines creates a barrier to library usage, that libraries actively move to eliminate them and urging the governing bodies of libraries strengthen funding support, so they are not dependent on fines as a source of revenue.”

During the November regular meeting, the Board voted unanimously to recommend to Council that the Scottsdale Public Library become late -fine-free. By implementing this change, Scottsdale would join the hundreds of public libraries nationwide, including our neighbors in Phoenix and Maricopa County, of which Fountain Hills is a branch library, that have done so. Now is the time to take this important step.

This does not mean that patrons will not be held accountable. Users that don't return checked out items will continue to be charged the cost of the borrowed item and their card blocked until the item is either returned or the fees are paid.

Scottsdale prides itself on providing exemplar service to our world-class community. Having punitive late fines is contrary to this objective. Eliminating late fines will assist the Library in reaching several strategic plan goals by increasing convenient access, improving the quality of customer service, and successfully expanding outreach efforts with Senior Centers and Social Services locations.

The "cost" of this action is estimated to be a \$140,000 reduction in fines revenue during the next fiscal year. This number has decreased each year as more patrons utilize electronic resources that automatically expire and is expected to continue to shrink. While not an insignificant amount, the Scottsdale Library Board strongly believes that the benefits of this move to the community far outweigh the cost. The Board encourages you to make this move without an adverse impact on the library's budget.

The Scottsdale Library Board welcomes the opportunity to meet with each of you to provide more data and to answer questions. We request that this item be placed on a future City Council Agenda or have a formal work study session scheduled prior to that.

Thank you for your consideration.